



2008 ALBERTA CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE RESOLUTION

Fully utilizing the skills and talents of immigrants in Alberta

Alberta's strong economy continues to produce jobs faster than the labour market can respond. The 2007 unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent and the Alberta government estimates that the province will experience a shortfall of 109,000 workers by 2016.¹ The Conference Board of Canada reports that "by 2011 when almost one-fifth of the baby boom generation will be at least 61 years of age, there will be a potential for shortages in certain occupations across Canada." While Alberta's population is younger in comparison to the rest of the country, by 2026, 20 per cent of Albertans will be age 65 or older.

Immigration is a potential solution to address the Alberta's labour market challenges. In 2006 Alberta welcomed 20,717 immigrants with 57 per cent of them settling in Calgary. This is the highest number received in Alberta. Over half immigrated from China, India and the Philippines, and 67 per cent had completed some post-secondary education. It is estimated that an additional 2,000 immigrants moved to Alberta from other parts of Canada.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce supports the provincial government's efforts to attract and retain immigrants to help alleviate labour shortages. However, a number of challenges to full employment of immigrants continue to exist.

Unnecessary barriers to foreign credential recognition exist in many professions and sectors. New Canadians need the shortest, most practical route to obtain Canadian credentials in their professions, without sacrificing standards. The ultimate goal is to give new immigrants the tools to become self-reliant and to take full advantage of the opportunities that Alberta affords.

By failing to properly recognize foreign credentials and experience, immigrants will continue to remain unemployed and/or under-contributing members of the Alberta economy – ultimately earning less income, paying less in taxes, and unable to afford the goods and services necessary to build their new lives in Canada. It is important that government, business and credential-granting bodies work together to improve the processing time and policies for the credential recognition of internationally trained professionals.

At the same time, the province needs to raise the profile of its International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) to ensure businesses and immigrants are aware of the opportunity to access assessments of foreign qualifications relative to provincial educational standards.

¹ Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. 2006. Alberta's Occupational Demand and Supply Outlook 2006-2016.



English language skills are an additional concern. In a 2007 survey of Calgary based businesses, 90 per cent of respondents indicated that a professional immigrant must speak, understand, read and write English well enough to be easily understood by others, in person, on the telephone, and to understand peers. However, in 2006, only 60 per cent of immigrants to Calgary from China, India and the Philippines spoke English. In order for these immigrants to succeed in the workplace, English language skills training are a must.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta:

1. Work with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to provide potential immigrants with accurate information about career prospects, and the realities of the Canadian education and credentialing system.
2. Work with business and professional credentialing bodies to develop more flexible approaches to recognizing credentials and experience, while maintaining Canadian standards.
3. Raise the profile of its International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) to ensure businesses and immigrants are aware of the opportunity to access reliable assessments of foreign educational qualifications relative to provincial educational standards.
4. Work with business and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to develop English literacy and language training programs for new immigrants and those waitlisted to arrive in Canada.